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Children from low socio-economic groups are handicapped by the lack of many experiences found to be conducive to success in developing school skills. The primary objective of this experimental program is the development of the cognitive skills and school behavior patterns deemed to be normal for children of their age.

The following skills are to be emphasized: 1) auditory perception and discrimination; 2) visual perception and discrimination; 3) language and verbal skills; 4) motor control and coordination with rhythm and timing; and 5) socialization. Eligible children are recruited and registered during the summer, and divided into an experimental and a control group. The school day consists of two two-hour sessions. Small-group lessons and related large-group activities are conducted. One teacher and one assistant worked with the children while a second assistant is free to work with parents. Parental participation and support is considered essential to maximize the benefits to the children.

A research design is built into the program, and teachers keep careful checklists, rating scales and anecdotal records which help the evaluation. In-service training provides for a month of staff orientation meetings at the beginning of the school year followed by weekly meetings throughout the year. Teachers assist in developing curriculum, and testing out new ideas.

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The Pre-Kindergarten Program

The Boston Public Schools and Action for Boston Community Development, Inc.

Studies of educational problems in our society indicate that there is a close relationship between low school achievement and low economic income. Kindergarten and first-grade children attending schools in the so-called "gray areas" manifest an increasing degree of unreadiness for adequate school adjustment. These children are handicapped by the lack of many experiences which educators have found to be conducive to success in developing school skills. It is clear, therefore, that a special program should be introduced at an early age to prepare these children for the school experiences which lie ahead.

In 1963 Action for Boston Community Development and the Boston Public Schools selected several school programs to assist the disadvantaged child, one of which was the Pre-Kindergarten Program.

A.B.C.D. and the Boston Public Schools working jointly felt that such a program with its enriched curriculum in basic skills for children ranging in age from 3.5 to 4.5 would enable the youngsters to experience success in the primary grades and forestall academic retardation as these children progress in school. It, therefore, has the essence of a preventive program.

The primary objective is the development of the cognitive skills and school behavior patterns deemed to be normal for children of their age. Emphasis is placed on the acquisition of the following skills:

1. Auditory perception and discrimination
2. Visual perception and discrimination
3. Language and verbal skills
4. Motor control and coordination with rhythm and timing
5. Socialization

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Selection and Recruitment

The names of eligible children were obtained from the Boston School Department, the Department of Public Welfare, and the Boston Housing Authority.

Registration dates were set early in June. Parents accompanied their children to the pre-kindergarten classroom to register; they were asked also to produce the child's birth certificate, and records of vaccination and other immunizations. Recruitment and registration procedures were carried on during the summer.

The research design is built into the program. The project is concerned with producing one set of changes which it hypothesizes will lead to a second set of changes. To measure the two sets of changes and the relationship between them, a carefully developed research operation is required. Among the questions to be answered would be: "Did those who were exposed to the program change in the direction called for by the objectives of the program?"

The Research Department of A.B.C.D. tested each eligible child using the Stanford Binet (1960) revision. It was made clear to the parent by means of the personal interview and a letter from the Boston School Department that this was an experimental program and that not every child initially tested would be chosen to participate. A random selection of eighty children was made and parents were notified that these children would make up the experimental classes. The eighty children who were not chosen by random selection made up the control group.

Curriculum, School Day, and Experiences

The calendar follows that, established by the Boston Public Schools.

The curriculum is being developed by the teachers under the guidance of the Director of Kindergartens.

The school day is divided into two sessions of approximately two hours each, the first from 8:45 to 11:15 A.M., the second from 11:45 A.M. to 2:15 P.M.

Experiences for the children are gained through small-group lessons and related large-group activities within which the skills basic to the program were developed. The daily program provides major blocks of time which are divided in this manner:

1. Arrival, greeting, informal inspection
2. Free-choice activities (small-group lessons)
3. Clean-up, toileting, lunch, rest
4. Roll call, music and rhythms (large-group activities)
5. Outdoor play or group games indoors
6. Dismissal

Careful checklists, rating scales, and anecdotal records are kept by the teachers. The staff of the Pre-Kindergarten Program consists of four pre-kindergarten classes, two of which are located in the Roxbury area and the other two located in the South End. There is every reason to believe that this program will be expanded to other sections of the city.

One teacher and the assistant work with the children leaving the second free to work with the parents in order to involve them in the program. As stated elsewhere, class sessions are two hours long.

In regard to parental involvement, it is essential that parental participation be solicited at the time of screening and encouraged throughout the program since it is assumed that parental support and involvement are necessary to maximize the benefits to the children participating in the pre-kindergarten classes.

Pre-service and in-service training of teachers are requisite to this program. The Boston Public Schools require that each pre-kindergarten teacher must be a permanently appointed member of the Boston Public School System assigned to the program by the superintendent. The assistant teachers must be graduates of a college or a nursery training school assigned to the program by the superintendent.

In-service training provides for one month of staff orientation meetings at the beginning of the school year followed by weekly staff orientation meetings throughout the year. The experimental nature of the pre-kindergarten calls for intensive and continuous teacher training.

Pre-kindergarten teachers assist in developing the curriculum, lessons to be evolved, and testing out new ideas.

A Pre-Kindergarten Advisory Board meets once a month to discuss problems pertinent to the program. The Board includes experts in the field of early childhood education.